

All the news that's flit to print

Badger ButterFlyer



The e-newsletter of the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association
A chapter of NABA (North American Butterfly Association) MAY, 2024
***NEW* WEB SITE:** <http://www.naba.org/chapters/SWBA>

1 NEW WEBSITE (again)

In late 2023, NABA switched over to a new website and we just had to tag along.

naba.org/chapters/swba

Our new site will be updated frequently as the season progresses. Take a look and you'll find our schedule of field trips and counts, along with lots of priceless information about where to find the bugs you're looking for. That's right—absolutely free, but we aren't offended if you show your thanks by starting or continuing your membership to NABA. Be sure to mention SWBA when you register as we get a percentage of your fees.

You'll also find all the Badger ButterFlyers going back to 2008—click and download! But don't stop there! Each month we'll feature an informative video as well as images of YOUR butterfly gardens. Submit a photo and it might show up on the web!

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2 THE STRANGE SPRING OF 2024 CONTINUED

MORE FEBRUARY SIGHTINGS

After a very mild winter, the butterflies started flying in February. Rory Williams reported the first-of-the-year on February 21st, a lone Mourning Cloak in the backyard in Neenah. By the end of the month, there were ten reports—the most for any February in wisconsinbutterflies.org records. Then another 40 sightings reported in March! Edgar Spalding found the earliest Cabbage White on record on March 7th, the same day Darcy Kind found the earliest Clouded Sulphur.

STRANGE WEATHER

The Wisconsin State Climatology Office reported that February 2024's average temperature statewide was 31.8 degrees F, 12.6 degrees warmer than the average from 1991-2020. For the entire winter, our average temperature, 28.3 F, surpassed our former record by 2 degrees. We also



had our first February tornado on record. These conditions, likely driven by El Niño, combined with extended dry conditions, also increased fire danger in the spring.

3 HOST PLANT: STINGING NETTLE (*Urtica dioica*)

2024 has already seen a significant influx of Red Admirals with many reports coming from along Lake Michigan. Why do these butterflies flock to Wisconsin in such numbers? It's most likely our grand buffet of caterpillar food plants, with Stinging Nettle leading the way. Nettles are quick to emerge in the spring, staying low to the ground until temperatures rise and the plants can quickly shoot upwards. Mature nettles may reach four feet or higher. Early Red Admirals find young shoots to lay their eggs; the caterpillars will have an abundant food source by the time they hatch. I've seen hundreds of the black spiky caterpillars on my favored nettle patch. Nettles also draw Milbert's Tortoiseshells, some Commas, and both American and Painted Ladies, though the Red Admirals are likely to leave little greenery for others in their good years.

Stinging nettles can be started from seed in the butterfly garden, but remember that "stinging" is an essential part of their identity. The tiny hairs will even go through clothing to give an irritating sting to the skin. Growing plants in less-traveled areas will limit your exposure while allowing the caterpillars their smorgasbord.



Young Stinging Nettle just coming up Photo: Douglas Buege



Red Admiral Caterpillar Photo: Douglas Buege

4 MEMBERSHIP

When you support the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) by joining, you can also help SWBA. Just let them know that you're part of our chapter, one of many throughout the continent. We'll get a portion of your payment back. We use contributions for costs of meetings and presentations, insurance, speakers and other important sustaining activities.

By joining, you'll also receive [American Butterflies](#) and [Butterfly Gardener](#), really fine magazines that will help you learn and enjoy the worlds of butterflies. You'll also be contributing to important efforts to preserve important habitats and to operate the National Butterfly Center in southern Texas at the Mexican border. And you'll be part of a growing movement to save our insect friends.

5 PERIODIC CICADA FIELD TRIP, JUNE 1 OR 8

Pat Fojut has organized a field trip to Big Foot Beach State Park for a yet-confirmed date in early June to see the ultra-rare convergence/emergence of 13-year and 17-year cicadas, an event that happens only every 221 years. The tentative dates will be either Saturday 6/1/24 OR 6/8/24 with Rain dates on 6/2 OR 6/9 respectively. The date will be determined closer to the end of May with the help of Lakeland Audubon Society. Folks will meet at Big Foot Beach state park at 11:00 am. A park sticker is required. Expect mosquitos and flying insects, wear protective clothing, long sleeves, solid shoes, hat and water. This fieldtrip is sponsored by WI Metro Audubon Society and Lakeland Audubon Society. To register, please see the SWBA website.

6 BUTTERFLY GARDENS DO HELP BUTTERFLIES, RESEARCHERS FIND

Lisbeth Hordley and Richard Fox in a recent article in *Science of the Total Environment* (March 6, 2024) show that simple practices by British residents can have great positive impact on butterfly and other invertebrate populations. Gathering data from more than 600 gardens across Great Britain, the Garden Butterfly Survey shows that areas of long grass and ivy had benefits for butterflies with grass as a host for their larvae. The researchers add, “Our work provides evidence that undertaking simple wildlife-friendly garden practices can be beneficial for attracting butterflies, particularly in heavily modified areas.”

7 FIELD TRIP TO CATHOLIC ECOLOGY CENTER, DODGE COUNTY

Saturday May 25, 2024

Leaders: Donna Williams-Richter and Ethan Brown

10:00 a.m.– 2:00 p.m.

The Catholic Ecology Center is part of a 225 acre preserve including prairies, forest, the Rubicon River, Otter Creek, a pond and organic gardening areas. Donna Williams-Richter and Ethan Brown will lead us in spotting the butterflies. Some butterflies that we are likely to see include Eastern Comma, Gray Comma, Question Mark, Red Admiral, American Lady, Painted Lady, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Black Swallowtail, Giant Swallowtail, Peck's Skipper, Hobomok Skipper and Mourning Cloak. Harvesters have been seen in numbers in the past, as well as colonies of Woolly Aphids, the host for this carnivorous caterpillar. Other exciting possibilities include Arctic Skipperling or one of the Tortoiseshells.

Long pants and long shirt sleeves, a hat, insect repellent, and hiking shoes are recommended. Bring binoculars—the closer they focus, the better!

If you would like to be contacted in case of cancellation or other changes, please register your intent to attend with Donna Williams-Richter (dowin124@gmail.com).

ACCESSIBILITY: Trails are easy to travel, but rain may cause them to be muddy so proper footwear is encouraged.

DIRECTIONS: Estimated travel times are 1 hour from Madison and 45 minutes from downtown Milwaukee. Meet in the parking area.

The Catholic Ecology Center is located at W1468 County Road NN Neosho, WI 53059. Google their website to get customized directions from your location.

8 LIST OF 2024 BUTTERFLY FIELD TRIPS

| FIELD TRIP | DAY | DATE | LEADERS |
|--|----------|-----------------------------|---|
| Spring Green Preserve | Sunday | April 28 10am to Noon | Mike Reese, Becky Abel and Emma Rasch |
| Catholic Ecology Center | Saturday | May 25 10am to Noon | Donna Williams-Richter Ethan Brown |
| Periodic Cicada Trip, Big Foot Beach State Park | Saturday | June 1 or 8 | Pat Fojut |
| Pleasant Valley Conservancy | Saturday | June 15 10am to Noon | Dr. Douglas Buege Kathy Brock |
| Cherokee Marsh Northern Unit | Saturday | June 22 10am to Noon | Tod Highsmith Dreux Watermolen |
| Sandhill Wildlife Area | Saturday | July 6 10am to 3pm | Ron Arnold |
| Shea Prairie | Sunday | July 14 10am to Noon | Donna Williams-Richter |
| Fair Meadows Sanctuary | Sunday | July 21 10am to Noon | Penny and Gary Shackelford and Mike Reese |

The **Badger ButterFlyer** flits to you every month in summer.

The next issue will be in **JUNE, 2024.**

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SWBA

The Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association (SWBA) is a non-profit Wisconsin chapter of the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) which is the largest organization of people interested in butterflies. SWBA promotes public awareness, conservation and the enjoyment of butterflies through observation with close-focusing binoculars, chapter field trips, educational meetings, photography, butterfly gardening, monitoring and travel. SWBA's events are open to the public.

To become a member of SWBA simply join NABA. Membership benefits include 2 color quarterly magazines "American Butterflies" and "Butterfly Gardening". Please use the membership form on the NABA Web site at <http://www.naba.org/>

Our e-Newsletter, the Badger ButterFlyer, will be published monthly in summer. Send any news notes to the editor, Dr Douglas Buege, at djbuege@gmail.com

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